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AUTHOR Cone, James Jay; Fulton, Ronald; Van Nieuwenhuyse, David
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ABSTRACT

The behavior of students in an 8th grade class was interfering with interpersonal relationships, disrupting the classroom environment, and adversely affecting student academic performance. A lack of social skills was identified as the probable cause which was brought on by the family environment, a lack of parent participation, and economic problems. This paper describes interventions of direct instruction of social skills, integration of cooperative learning, and an assertive discipline plan to help with the behaviors. Following the interventions, many students showed a positive change in behavior. It was determined that cooperative learning techniques aided in the instruction of social skill lessons. The paper recommends that direct instruction of social skills be implemented as a regular part of middle school curriculum. The paper includes Appendix A, "Parent Letter," Appendix B, "Teacher Observation Checklist," Appendix C, "Expected Classroom Behaviors," Appendix D, "Student Survey," and Appendix E, "Teacher Survey." (Contains 21 references.) (JDM)

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IMPROVING STUDENT BEHAVIOR BY TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

James Jay Cone'

Ronald Fulton

David Van Nieuwenhuyse

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership.

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Dean, School of Education

ABSTRACT

James Cone'
Ronald Fulton
Dave Van Neiuwenhuyse

Improving Student Behavior by Teaching Social Skills

Students in the targeted eighth grade class exhibited a lack of social skills which interfered with their interpersonal relationships, the classroom environment, and their academic performance.

The probable causes for the lack of social skills in the students were changes in family structure, increased number of "latch key" children , and economic distress. Lack of parental control and social changes were major causes of these problems.

After reviewing research literature and evaluating the classroom setting a decision was made to select interventions of direct instruction of social skills, integration of cooperative learning, and an assertive discipline plan were the interventions of choice.

The interventions proved to be positive in respect to student behavior. Many students showed a positive change through the teaching of various social skills. Cooperative learning techniques and strategies aided in the instruction of the social skills lessons. The researchers recommend the direct instruction of social skills be implemented as a regular part of the curriculum.

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted classes showed a lack of social skills that interfered with their ability to remain focused on instructional tasks and hampered their academic achievement. The existence of the problem was evident in teacher observation, anecdotal records, and student surveys. The classes targeted were at the junior high level. One class was an eighth grade physical education class and the other was an eighth grade art class. Both of these junior high classes were organized in a traditional setting with classrooms that were departmentalized by subjects.

Local Context of the Problem

The targeted classes are housed in a school building with about 600 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The school maintained an average of 25 students per class. Eighty-three percent of the students were Caucasian, 9% were African American, and 8% were Hispanics . The school had a 92% attendance rate, a 1% chronic truancy rate, and a 22% student mobility rate. Low income families accounted for 61% of the enrollment, while 3% had limited English proficiency. Of the 600 students in the targeted school, 360 were entitled to free or reduced priced lunch for an average of 60%, compared to a 52% rate for the entire district. The junior high staff was comprised of many experienced teachers. Among the teaching staff there were 11 male and 5 female full time employees.

The targeted classes were in a three-story school that was approximately 50 years old. The building held two classes of each elementary grade and five junior high home rooms of seventh and eight grade. The first two floors were for the elementary classes and three resource classes for children with special needs. The third floor was exclusively junior high. An older addition located above the gymnasium housed three special education rooms, a computer lab, as well as a music room and a band room. On the main floor of the building there were offices for the secretary, principal, dean of students, the gifted coordinator, an alternative program for troubled youth, a cafeteria, and two gymnasiums. The administration offices for the school district were also located in this building.

A variety of courses were offered to the students in school. Mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, home economics, vocational agriculture, choir, band, computer, physical education, health, and art were offered in the junior high. A number of sports programs were also provided for the students as extra curricular activities. Among the sports available to students were football, volleyball, basketball, wrestling, track, cheerleading, and pompons.

The building also housed a district-wide after school tutoring program for students who needed extra academic help or for students whose parents worked late. The program was entitled A.B.C.D. The idea of the program was to provide a safe place to go after school that could be used to help students with academic needs. The county Youth Services Bureau and Bridgeway were among the organizations that helped students overcome social and emotional problems and provided counseling for the children and their families. A strong parent teacher organization also helped by raising money for a variety of items to benefit the children, such as computers, school supplies, and playground equipment. This organization was also beneficial in financing field trips for students.

The Community Setting

The local setting was located in a small west central Illinois town. The town had a population of approximately 13,000 people. The surrounding county had a population of about 50,000 people. The original town was founded in 1836. By the summer of 1839, there were five boys and eight girls of school age. Thus, the founding fathers established the first school in an old log church within the town. Another town was formed due to the building of the railroad north of the original community. The two towns joined together as one community in the 1850's.The town's population reached its peak in the late 1930's. The government of choice was of city manager form. The police, fire, water, and sewage service were municipally operated. Several religious sects were represented in the community. The local financial institutions had a combined assets of almost $200,000,000. There were also a local newspaper and a radio station.

The community job market was based on an agricultural and industrial background. Many of the factories were started by local community members and agriculture was ruled by the family farm. The labor force was made up of 29% professional services, 44% manufacturing, and 19% wholesale and retail. About 1,500 people were employed by the three major manufacturing firms. The local hospital and affiliated clinics employed around 450 people. According to the local chamber of commerce 20% of the working families in the city earned less than $10,000 per year. In addition to this 57% of the families earned between $10,000 and $25,000 yearly.

Active people could find many things to do in the community. A new exercise and rehabilitation facility was opened. The local YMCA offered many adult and youth activities such as basketball, tumbling, swimming, soccer, floor hockey, Nautilus, weight lifting, racquetball, indoor track, and various volleyball leagues. The park

district offered the public a quality 18 hole golf course, youth and adult baseball and softball, tennis, horse shoe, and volleyball leagues, as well as raising funds for an aquatic center. One bowling alley had youth and adult leagues year round while another was being reconstructed after a serious fire. A new state juvenile correction facility was constructioned in the community.

Although the towns merged many years ago, they retained separate school systems. Thus the community had two individual public school districts. The community also had two parochial schools, one was kindergarten through eighth grade and the other was kindergarten through sixth grade. Four elementary schools in the district fed one junior high and the high school. The total student district population was about 1,800. The average years of teaching experience was 18 with 57% having had a bachelors degree and the other 41% of the staff with a masters. The ratio of pupils to teachers was 21 to 1 at the elementary level and 23 to 1 at the secondary level. The average teaching salary was $38,000. The administrative ratio was 422 to 1 and the average salary was $79,000.

National Context

A problem facing teachers at the state and national level was student discipline. The students' discipline problems were due to inappropriate social skills.This had been an on going problem for educators since the beginning of school. Teachers felt that valuable instruction time was being wasted due to student disruptive behavior. Student behavior is a problem that all teachers face. Borquist and Schmidgall (1997) stated that teacher observations, office referrals, and student surveys have been used to document the problem. Analysis of the site information indicated that issues related to inadequate facilities, under staffing, and lack of parental involvement were probable causes. Further analysis revealed that population shifts, single parent families, and low socioeconomic status could be contributing factors.

Many of the problems teachers faced were directly related to inappropriate social skills according to Bunke and Edwards (1997). The problem of inappropriate behaviors was documented by means of behavior checklist, student surveys, teacher anecdotal records, and student reflection sheets. Analysis of probable cause data indicated that increased class size, student mobility, limited opportunity for students' activities outside the classroom, and unclear and inconsistent consequences for student misbehavior were contributing factors. Review of literature revealed that changing family structures, negative media influence, and traditional competitive classroom climate were also probable causes.

The problem student is a major concern for teachers. In today's classroom disruptive disruptive behavior distracted from important instruction time. As a result, other students in class are deprived of a proper learning environment. McManus and Gettinger (1996) were very aware of the need for appropriate social skills instruction. From this research students with inappropriate social skills were found to have poor listening habits, have trouble following directions, and find it difficult to stay on tasks. McManus and Gettinger (1996) suggested that these students also exhibited low self esteem.

Disruptive behavior in the classroom has accounted for far too much instructional time being wasted. The teaching and practice of appropriate social skills may help remediate the problem.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Students exhibited inappropriate behavior in the targeted junior high class rooms. The students did not know how to behave in appropriate, effective ways that were conducive to learning. This lack of social skills interfered with classroom activities and academic achievement. Both of the targeted junior high classes were organized in a traditional setting with classrooms that were departmentalized by subjects.

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of student lack of appropriate social skills, exhibition of disruptive behavior, and demonstration of poor academic success, a variety of assessments were used. The assessment tools consisted of teacher surveys, student surveys, teacher observation checklists, and anecdotal records. The teacher and student surveys were given as pretests to show evidence of the problem. the surveys were later used again as post tests to measure the results of the intervention.

The junior high teachers were surveyed regarding classroom rules, student respect for authority figures and peers, discipline problems, and other factors that hampered successful teaching (Table 1). The teachers responded to the surveys with answers that ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagree. Space was provided for any anecdotes, observations, and feelings they had regarding discipline problems that they had or previously had. The information in Table one shows how teachers responded to the questions on the survey.

Table 1

Preintervention Teacher Survey Results

Class Problems	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students maintain appropriate noise level	20%	50%	30%	-
Students don't stay on task	10%	70%	20%	-
Students show respect for peers	-	20%	50%	30%
Students respect authority	-	30%	40%	30%
Students follow classroom rules	-	70%	30%	-
Behavior problems are less frequent	20%	40%	30%	10%
Discipline problems detract for instruction	50%	20%	20%	10%
Discipline problems have increased lately	50%	40%	-	10%

A majority (70%) believed that their students maintained an appropriate noise level in class. At the same time, teachers felt that the majority (80%) had difficulty staying on task. Several teachers cited lack of homework being turned in or poor quiz scores for this assessment. In less structured settings teachers (80%) seemed to notice a lack of student respect for authority. Almost as many (70%) felt that students showed a lack of respect for authority figures. Teachers believed that most students did follow the rules and some behavior problems were being removed from their classrooms because of a new referral system and new principal. A majority of teachers (70%) believed that discipline problems detracted from classroom instruction. The survey also revealed that an overwhelming majority (90%) of teachers believed that discipline problems increased in recent years. Of the ten teachers that responded to the survey, seven added personal comments. The majority of comments dealt with the lack of social skills, such as talking when the teacher was talking, talking out of turn, and respect for other's property. Other problems mention frequently included student waste of study time, students being easily distracted, and not bringing required materials to class.

A student survey (Table 2) was given to 50 students in two different junior high classes. The survey questions were designed to help determine how students felt about their behavior and how they interacted with others. Each student was asked to answer eight questions by circling a choice of always, sometimes, or never.

Table 2

Preintervention Student survey Results

Questions	Always	Sometime	Never
Do you avoid trouble?	12%	88%	-
Are you an honest person?	18%	82%	-
Are you kind to others?	22%	78%	-
Are you polite to others?	24%	76%	-
Are you a helpful person?	32%	66%	2%
Do you try to get along with others?	52%	48%	-
Do you act the same at home and school?	16%	54%	30%
Do you think your behavior is good?	16%	80%	4%

The majority of the students respond to answering the questions with an answer of sometimes. Only 12% felt they could answer the first question (Do you avoid trouble?) with an always answer. A slightly larger number (18%) said they were always honest. That answer might explain why teachers have trouble believing student responses. This factor alone would make difficult to determine fault in many discipline situations. Less than 25% felt they were always kind and polite to others. A few more people felt that they were always helpful. Researchers found that 52% felt they always tried to get along with others. The student survey revealed that only 16% responded that they acted the same at home as they did in school. The more interesting statistic in that question was that 30% responded that they did not act the same at home as they did at school. This could explain why so many parents arrive at school with the assumption that child could not be involved in a problem at school when this type of behavior is not exhibited at home. Finally 80% believed that their

behavior is only good some of the time.

Literally interpreting the student responses, it would seem that many of the students understand their involvement in the problems that teachers face. A majority (88%) of the students stated that they do not always avoid trouble. When trouble occurs, these students are most likely to be involved and add to the problem. Only 18% of the students surveyed considered themselves honest all of the time. Resolution of discipline problems would be hampered when the truth is hard to determine. Inconsistencies seem to exist among the student answers. Over half the student believed that they try to get along with others but a much smaller percentage believe they are kind, polite and helpful to others.

Another instrument that was used to provide evidence that the problem existed were the use of anecdotal office records. There were over 1,000 visits to the office by junior high school students for the 1998-99 school year.The major cause for the office visits were discipline problems. Since teachers felt that there was a link between lack of appropriate social skills and discipline problems, this factor becomes important in the analysis of the problem. Student behavior reveals insights between inappropriate social skills and poor student behavior which would have a negative impact on a students academic growth.

In summary, the problems of inappropriate social skills and poor classroom behavior by junior high students were supported by the evidence given. An overview of the problem through teachers surveys, student surveys, and discipline referral records indicated that a problem did exist.

Probable Causes

A problem facing teachers at the state and national levels is student discipline. Inappropriate social skills are a major factor that contributes to the student discipline problem. Teachers believe that valuable instruction time is being wasted due to

student disruptive behavior. This wasted time could be better spent on learning social skills and academic advancement. All teachers face the student behavior problems. Teachers in traditional classroom settings find that students are not encouraged to work together. This seems to reinforce improper behavior and poor social skills.

Changes in the family structure, latch-key children, or children cared for by non-family members, and economic distress are all contributing factors why children grow up without learning sociably acceptable behavior. A failure to learn is often the only outcome for many of the students in these categories.

The targeted school was located in a small west central Illinois town. The targeted school reflected the problems that many communities face across the nation. Single-parent families, working mothers, low-income households, and the disintegration of family life are all causes that produced children lacking social skills. A lack of parental supervision in the home today has been traced to the breakdown of traditional family life.

According to the 1990 census, in the local community the percentage of households with single-parent families was 36.7%. The number of students on free or reduced lunch in the targeted school accounted for 60% of the student body. These two factors alone indicated evidence of a change in the traditional family structure. Single, as well as married mothers, are among today's work force. Many mothers leave children unattended at home to handle difficult situations on their own. Without parental supervision, the children are left with little or no guide lines to follow.

Evidence of economic distress also existed in the local community. Over 50% of the working families earned an annual income between $10,000 and $25,000 according to the statistics from the chamber of commerce. Fawcett & Rasinski (1995) reported that two-thirds of employed parents with children under 18, acknowledged that they were not spending enough time with their children. Garbarino (1997) found

that some studies reported a 50% decrease in the amount of time parents had spent with their children over the last 30 years. Along with lack of parent supervision and involvement, Dobson (1992) believed that parental attitudes towards disciplining their young have changed quite rapidly as well. In the home as well as outside the home, the trend has been to allow more permissiveness by placing fewer restrictions and limits on behavior. Supervised or not, many students are permitted to stay up late at night or are using illegal substances or alcohol. Teachers should not be held accountable for students poor academic performance due to these factors.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that poor classroom behavior and lack of social skills are major concerns of educators. Researchers suggested the following causes: parental and current cultural factors. a socially injurious environment, ineffective teacher training, poor classroom management, unprepared teachers, and the lack of appropriate social skills.

Lack of parental control and the breakdown of family life, as reported by Elam and Rose (1995), were major causes of the increased increased in discipline in the school and of social skills in students. Elam and Rose stated that disruptive student behavior is a contributing factor for teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. Parents also expressed concerns about student behavior to teachers. Other social problems and outside pressures contribute to the difficulty schools are experiencing in maintaining good discipline. Dobson (1992) believed that what goes on in the classroom cannot be separated from the problems occurring in society at large.

Today's children are living with many more stresses than children of a decade or even five years ago. Single-parent families, dual employed parents, unemployed parents, and teen parents have produced children with limited coping skills. Fiske (1991) reported that 60% of students live in a family were both parents or the single parent works. Many parents are too busy or too uneducated to help prevent families

from unraveling.

The researchers found that economic, social, and personal factors are associated with the lack of social skills; and the basic social skills are missing in many students. These social skills are essential for building interpersonal interaction related to community, school, and family.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Students exhibited inappropriate behavior in the targeted eighth grade classrooms. The students did not know how to behave in appropriate, effective ways that were conducive to learning. This lack of social skills interfered with classroom activities and academic achievement.

Iannaccone, Wienke, and Cosden (1992) wrote that a lack of social skills was viewed as a critical factor contributing to the social problems of todays' youth. As defined by the teacher researchers, lack of social skills caused inappropriate behavior among peers and others, including lack of respect and consideration of others. In the classroom, the lack of social skills often manifested itself through incomplete homework, lack of class preparation, unnecessary physical contact, excessive noise, profane language, and insubordination.

When addressing physical or verbal behavior and being off task in the classroom, support can be found in professional literature for direct instruction of social skills. Discipline was ranked as the number one problem for parents and educators for the past fifteen years (Evanston and Harris ,1992). Warger and Rutherford (1996) stated that children increasingly come to school needing to be taught social skills because they are needed to be demonstrated during academic lessons.

Clearly, schools are not in a position to solve all of society's problems, but they

must find ways of minimizing the negative impact of such problems on teaching and the learning process. Regardless of what students bring to school, teachers are expected to maintain an orderly and supportive environment so all class members have opportunities to learn and experience success. Gottfredson, Gottfredson and Hybl (1993) found that misbehaving youths displayed less academic competence, disliked school, had more delinquent friends, and had lower levels of belief in conventional social rules then did their conforming peers. They tended to display poor interpersonal relations and were often rejected by their peers because of their aggression and poor social skills. Deluke and Knoblock (1987) agreed that students who demonstrated numerous incidents of inappropriate behavior continued to fail to learn. They cited that often students with behavior problems were those with poor social skills. When the desired behaviors were not available to a student, Manuele and Cichelli (1984) believed the teaching of these skills or socially acceptable behavior was necessary for the individual to function more effectively in a variety of interpersonal contexts. Cummings and Haggerty (1997) stated that both education and the business sectors have identified this need.

Social skills techniques are more effective than traditional punitive actions for helping student acquire more positive behavior. Cummings and Haggerty (1997) suggested that social skills instruction is needed to address the critical needs of the nation's youth. Social skills instruction can have a long term positive effect on the students' interactions with others, on their own attitudes towards school, and on their academic achievement. Magg and Weber (1995) added that all students benefit from social skills instruction.

Evertson and Harris (1992) quoted a Gallop Poll that had reported the public's belief that improving discipline would be the answer to many school problems.The teaching of social skills would improve the increasing number of behavior problems

(Kreidler 1994). Reducing the number of behavior problems would create a more conducive environment for learning. These social skills are vital to learning but are taught separately from the academic curriculum.

Brown, McEvoy, and Bishop (1991) said that success in school depends on students mastering many behaviors that cannot be taught as academic skills. Children who fail to acquire appropriate social skills have lower probability of completing school, becoming employed,and becoming well adjusted adults (Elksin and Elksin 1998).

The researchers suggested that a direct link existed between a lack of social skills and learning problems. Cater and Sugai (1989) wrote that learning difficulties were often based on poor behavior. Proper teaching and reinforcement of social skills would improve classroom behavior and improve learning. Cummings and Harris (1997) felt that academic achievement increased with the students use of proper social and emotional skills.

Social skills can be taught to students through many techniques. But first, a proper environment must be created for these lessons to be taught successfully. Glasser (1997) emphasized that teachers cannot force students to learn, but can provide an environment where students are encouraged to learn. Cooperative learning is a viable means to develop that environment in the classroom. By setting goals, Glasser (1986) believes that students will learn to control their behavior, especially lessons where the outcomes will effect the entire class. Johnson and Johnson believed that students that are taught, coached, and monitored in the use of cooperative social skills, will enhance group work (as cited by Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

A challenge for teachers using cooperative learning is accommodating students with diversities and disabilities. Ornstein (1996) felt that using cooperative learning

methods helped students succeed, especially among low-achieving students. Slavin's (1981) research suggested that cooperative strategies can easily be used to promote heterogeneous grouping to benefit poor and minority children. This proved to be more desirable than previous techniques like tracking and ability grouping. To successfully implement and manage the cooperative learning classroom, teachers need the support of staff and administration.

Without administration and peer support, establishing cooperative learning may be challenging. Murray (1992) wrote about the Cooperative Learning Project at Cleveland State University. Nine middle schools that implemented cooperative learning were studied. Teachers and administrators participated in trying to jointly implement cooperative learning throughout the school year. The following conclusions were suggested as a result of the project. (1)Joint training of teachers and administrators was most effective. (2)A classroom environment for cooperative learning must be provided. (3)Support teams must be recognized by and promoted by administration. (4)The administration must be knowledgeable about cooperative learning and receptive to personal initiative and building innovations.

To have a successful cooperative learning atmosphere, students must be taught social skills. Changes in social behavior especially peer groups, social norms, and expectations need to be addressed. We cannot assume that social skills taught at an early age will be remembered. Rice (1994) believed that at the beginning of the school year should be teaching and assessing social skills. Role playing can enhance the transfer of social skills. As the students acquire the necessary skills for group work, the cooperative learning atmosphere is enhanced. Teachers need to vary their instruction methods. Students should be allowed freedom of movement. Students need to have opportunities for risk taking and not be looked down on for original ideals. In a safe classroom risk taking is an acceptable process. Kagan (1972) feels

that many cooperative learning techniques lend themselves to problem solving and the application of thinking tasks. He believes that partnering process involved in cooperative learning can work at any level of thinking. Cooperative learning can also provide students with the opportunity to develop new friendships and to form a sense of community.

Greater student ownership, the use of varied teaching techniques, practical applications, and cooperative learning were all solution strategies that strengthened motivation and encouraged student learning. Incorporating higher order thinking skills and using authentic assessment within the classroom were additional solutions that literature revealed. Get students involved in the development of classroom rules and consequences. Reinforce positive behavior of students in and out of the classroom. Teachers can use nonverbal communication and body language to thwart classroom problems. The more the students are involved in these processes the less likely there will be student misbehavior.

The researchers examination of the literature revealed that the teaching of social skills may improve students behavior and increase academic achievement. Cooperative learning was used to enhance social skills and to create a positive learning environment.

Action Plan

As a result of implementing direct instruction of social skills during the period of September 1999 to January 2000 the students in the targeted eighth grade class will show improvement in behavior as measured by anecdotal records and teacher observation check lists.

Processes used to accomplish these objectives:

A. Develop instruction materials for direct instruction of social skills.

B. Apply cooperative learning activities to enhance social skill.

C. Use social skills to improve behavior and to increase academic achievement.

Week 1/2

Social Skill: Following Directions

A. discuss following class rules

B. divide into cooperative base groups for ten weeks

Week 3/4

Social Skill: Listening

A. class discussion on common courtesy

B. student introduction listening exercise

Week 5/6

Social Skill: Staying on task

A. class discussion of importance of staying on task

B: assign cooperative group assignment

Week 7/8

Social Skill: Staying in seat

A. class discussion why staying in seat is important

B. in cooperative groups write list of reasons to stay in seat

Week 9/10

Social Skill: Honesty

A. class discussion of honesty

B. group must role play if someone found five dollars on playground

Methods of Assessment

To determine the effects of the intervention, behavior checklists will be kept by teachers to monitor students' classroom performance. The observation checklist will include behaviors such as talking out of turn, disturbing other students, and lack of self control. Assessment will also be made using teacher and student surveys as post tests and then compared them to the pretesting done in September.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description

The object of the project was to improve student behavior, increase academic achievement, and keep the students on task by implementing social skills instruction though the use of cooperative learning in eighth grade health and art classes to reach researchers desired outcomes.

During the first week of interventions students in the targeted eighth grade art and health classes were taught on the rules for proper behavior in classrooms and in school in general. Expected behavior lists were put into every classroom as a means of positive reinforcement. Cooperative learning groups and class discussion were used to instill the desired behaviors. A letter was sent home to the parents describing the researchers' intent to present social skills instruction (Appendix A). A student survey was given to check on their behavior and habits at home and school. Teachers were also given a postintervention survey to check the students' behavior and asked to keep a daily teacher observation checklist of student behavior as the interventions proceeded (Appendix B).

The first week of intervention, students were placed into cooperative groups after a teacher led-discussion on the importance of following directions. Each of the groups' recorders kept a list of reasons why it was important to follow directions. The presenter read the list to the class to compare similarities between groups. The

following week students were presented with an origami project to reinforce the importance of following directions. Each base group was required to complete the lesson.

Researchers introduced the importance of listening skills to students in week three of of the intervention. A class discussion on common courtesy and the importance of good listening skills were used. The talking stick strategy was used while students were in their base groups. This idea encouraged students to listen when others were talking and only talk when it was their turn. The following week students had to pair-share a lesson of drawing a design that was described by their partner and then reverse roles. This was to reinforce the importance of good listening skills.

Weeks five through ten, researchers continued the social skills instruction lessons. Cooperative learning methods were used to to stress the importance of staying on task, staying in their seats, and practicing honesty. Positive reinforcement was used to help motivate students to accomplish the weekly skills. Researchers used very similar lessons when possible but also developed their own individual lessons to fit the two different content areas.

Graphic organizers and multiple intelligence strategies were introduced as learning tools to enhance cooperative learning techniques. Each lesson included an opportunity to practice the multiple intelligence and thinking skill in the context of the instruction unit. The targeted skill of each unit was then assessed formally through the use of a completed task checklist.

Also important in the social skills instruction was the reinforcement of rules, consequences, and rewards. The posting of the rules in rooms was an important addition to the project (Appendix C). The review of previous lessons was done primarily though the use of positive reinforcement when appropriate student behavior

was observed.

At the completion of the ten week intervention, students were again given the survey as a evaluation tool (Appendix D). The surveys helped identify personal progress towards improved behavior and more appropriate social skills. Students were also asked to do a reflection at the end of the survey on the effectiveness of the program. A postintervention survey was also given to to the teachers to see if they had any measurable improvement in the students' behavior in their classes (Appendix E). The researchers collected teacher checklists in order to provide feedback in the other classroom situations. Teachers were also asked to comment on the interventions and to note if improvements in student behavior had led to improvement in classroom instruction time and class management.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to improve student behavior, increase instruction time, and make classroom management more productive, researchers used cooperative learning lesson plans which incorporated social skills instruction. Student and teacher surveys, as well as teacher observation checklists, were used to compile data.

Table 3 indicates the results of the teachers surveys given prior to and following the researchers interventions. Teachers' answers to the survey were assigned a number according to their responses. Four points were given to an answer of strongly agree, three points to agree, two points to disagree, and the lowest score of one point was given to strongly disagree.

According to the data in Table 3, the greatest change came in the area of classroom behavior. Teachers surveyed found a decrease in behavioral problems after the interventions. When students displayed appropriate social skills in the class room the behavioral problems diminished. A substantial increase was also indicated with the students staying on task and following classroom rules. Appropriate social

skills instruction had an influence on these areas as well.

Table 3

Preintervention and postintervention teacher survey results.

Teacher Survey		
Questions	Preintervention	Postintervention
Students maintain appropriate noise level.	2.9	3.5
Students have difficulty staying on task.	2.9	3.6
Students show respect for peers.	1.9	2.5
Students show respect for authority figures.	2.0	2.8
Students are able to follow classroom rules.	2.7	3.4
Behavior problems are less frequent in class.	2.7	3.6
Discipline problems do not detract from instruction time.	2.8	3.2
Discipline problems have increased in recent years.	3.3	3.4

Gains were made in areas of appropriate noise level and respect for authority figures and other students. Moderate increases were also noted in the amount of instructional time gained. The question concerning student discipline problems increasing in recent years seemed to remain almost unchanged. Student awareness of appropriate social skills had a direct influence on all of the questions asked on the survey.

The data above has the results of the teacher survey. It shows that there is clearly a positive increase in all the behaviors indicated. The question dealing with discipline problems being removed from class does show the largest disparity. Other

responses ranging from following classroom rules to showing respect for others showed an obvious increase. The only question that seemed unchanged was the question of discipline problems increasing in recent years. This question would not have been affected by the intervention.

Teachers also kept observation checklists on various student behaviors observed over the first semester of the intervention period. Table 4 documents the number of times a targeted behavior was observed. According to the data collected, an overall number of occurrences were noted over the semester. Although some of the results increased on occasions such as before and after the holidays.

Table 4

Range of student behavior observed by teachers over first semester.

Observations	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.
Not to class on time	43	35	37	32	30
Talks out of turn	164	144	124	133	114
Disturbs other students	122	112	92	102	82
Does not stay on task	76	63	51	57	42
Cannot keep hands to self	98	106	95	90	80
Talks back to teacher	62	57	52	49	44
Lacks self control	40	38	35	33	26
Seeks out trouble	48	40	44	37	30
Does not accept consequences for actions	64	55	52	48	40
Does not stay in seat	114	88	99	75	72

Teachers indicated by the number of occurrences that talking out of turn, disturbing other students, and not staying in seat were the three most prevalent problems. These problems decreased after the interventions had started.

The talking stick strategy on other social skills lessons helped students to be more courteous and did not talk out of turn as often. Students staying in their seats was another social skill targeted during the intervention. These numbers seemed rather

high, but they included several vocational classes such as art, home economics, and industrial arts where students have more freedom to move about the room.

Classes such as these require students to be out of their seat with more frequency. Many junior high students have a hard time dealing with this type of structured class environment. Discipline problems occur more frequently when students are given this type of freedom. With this in mind, it was not hard to understand that keeping their hands to themselves was also a problem.

Other items on the teachers checklist were important such as being to class on time, and self control showed a significant decrease over time. The data clearly show the continued decrease overtime that these behaviors were observed.These statistics help support the observations from the teacher surveys noted in Table 1.

Table 5

Comparisons of Class A and Class B Student Survey Results Preintervention

Students Survey Totals
preintervention

Questions	Class A	Class B	Totals
Do you avoid trouble?	2.1	2.2	4.3
Are you an honest person?	2.3	2.2	4.5
Are you kind to others?	2.2	2.1	4.3
Are you polite to others?	2.4	2.2	4.6
Are you a helpful person?	2.3	2.4	4.7
Do you try to get along with others?	2.5	2.7	5.2
Do you act the same at home and school?	1.9	1.9	3.8
Do you think your behavior is good?	2.2	2.1	4.3

The targeted classes were given a preintervention survey that asked eight positive questions. Table 5 lists the list the questions and the surveys results. The

student response were always sometimes, and never. The always response scored the highest with a score of three points given, sometimes scored two points , and never scored one point. In Table 5 the scores have been scored and averaged by the two targeted classes. Class A was the larger of the two with 30 students, but had two students absent the day of the preintervention survey. Class B was the smaller class with 21 students who were all present the day of the survey. The results of the survey are listed below with a comparison of the postintervention survey results in table 6.

The researchers found that most of the students from the targeted classes answered sometimes to the questions as their most frequently given response. In both classes 70% was the average times that sometimes was the answer to the questions. On only six student surveys did students mark that they avoided trouble. Over half the students surveyed answered that they had gotten along with others. Only eight of the students considered their behavior to be good and nine students said they acted the same at school as at home.

Table 6

Comparison of Class A and Class B Student Survey Results Postintervention

Students Survey Totals post intervention **Questions**	Class A	Class B	Totals
Do you avoid trouble?	2.2	2.6	4.8
Are you an honest person?	2.5	2.7	5.2
Are you kind to others?	2.2	2.7	4.9
Are you polite to others?	2.4	2.8	5.2
Are you a helpful person?	2.5	2.9	5.4
Do you try to get along with others?	2.5	2.7	5.2
Do you act the same at home and school?	2.1	2.3	4.4
Do you think your behavior is good?	2.5	2.7	5.2

Table 6 above shows the postintervention student survey results. As in Table 5

the same point value was assigned to each answer and the class scores were separated and then averaged. Researchers found a positive increase in scores in both classes after the interventions had taken place. Certain behaviors show a larger increase. Class A started with a rather low number of answers of always to the surveys before social skills instruction. The numbers after interventions showed the always answers had doubled. The most notable increases were in the questions concerning honesty, being helpful, and overall good behavior. In class B the researchers had a larger increase of almost triple the number of questions that were answered always.

The largest increases for class B in the always column were the issues of overall behavior and being polite to others. According to the students in class B, they believed that their behavior and perception of others had improved a great deal since the interventions had taken place. The researchers found it interesting that the only negative answer on any of the surveys given was on the issue of behavior at school as opposed to home and the numbers of the responses to this decreased postintervention.

Figure 1 shows the comparative results of the preintervention and postintervention results. The researchers combine the two classes and averaged the scores. The graph displays the increases to all the behavioral questions asked except one. The largest increases occurred with the questions about being helpful and honest. The student responses showed that were conscious about being polite and kind to others. The post social skills instruction surveys showed increases in every question with exception of getting along with others which remained the same.

When comparing the scores from the teachers surveys and the student surveys, researcher found that students felt the had improved considerably more in use of social skills than the teacher results indicated. Both the teachers and the students showed greater use of social skills use after the intervention period.

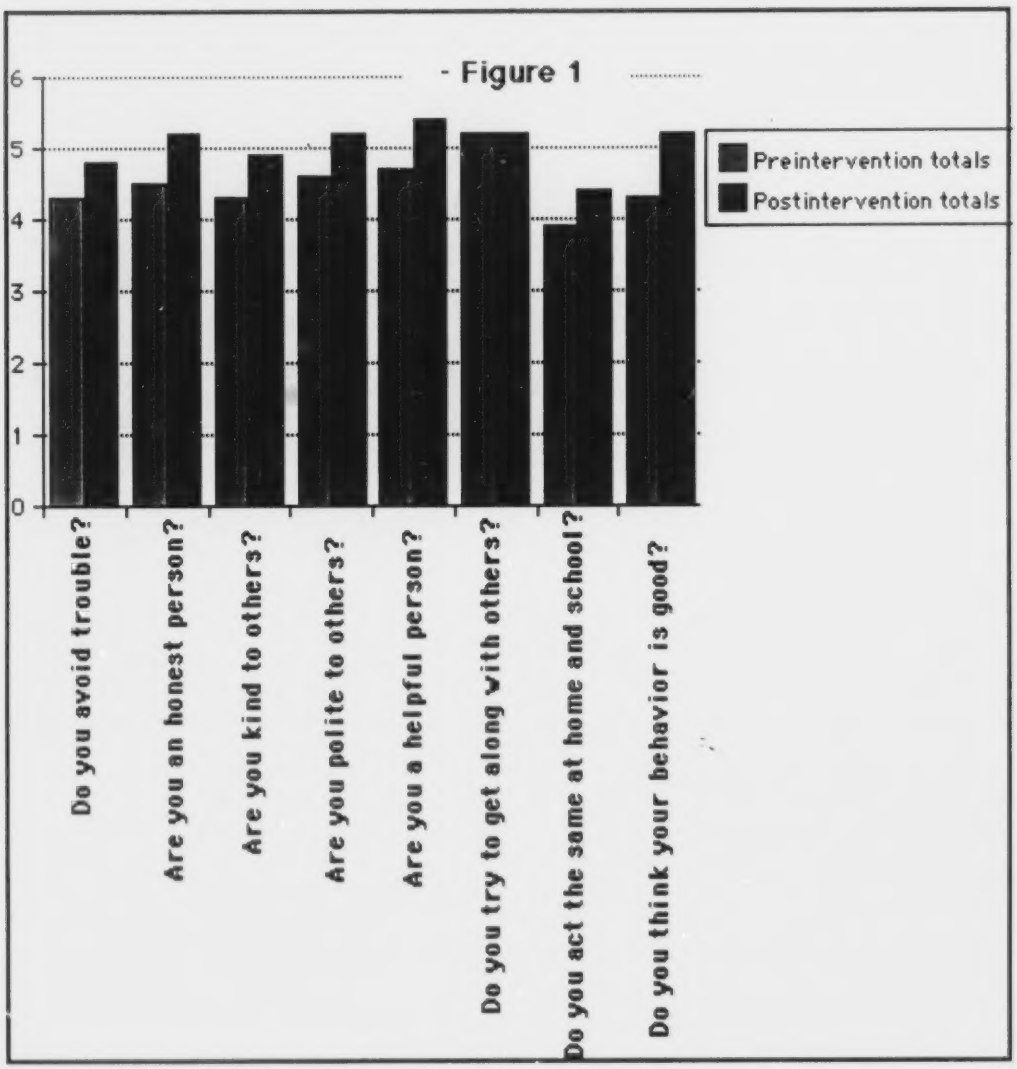

Figure 1 - Comparative Results of Students Surveys Between Class A and Class B

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, The students showed a slight improvement in the knowledge and use of social skills following the intervention

period. Even though the data did reflect much improvement in the use of social skills, teachers commented on the need to constantly reinforce the social skills being taught. The vocational staff also felt that some of the data may have been skewed due to the nature of unstructured format of their class environment. Time on task in the targeted classes also improved.

When a conflict did arise, the social skills taught were used and reinforced by both teachers and students. Some parents commented on the effectiveness of the interventions as their childrens social skills had improved at home. Some transfer must have taken place between school and home. One parent noticed less fight between a targeted student and the other siblings at home. She credited the researchers social skill instruction for this improvement. The use of role playing during some of the lessons was mentioned by some students as a fun way to learn new skills and to be able to see both sides of a situation. The cooperative nature of the learning task and the positive peer interaction during the presentation of lessons had a beneficial impact on student involvement.

The researchers recommend the teaching of social skills with some modification to the action plan. Do to the time limits of the time line of the action plan, the data had to be collected just prior to and immediately after the interventions had occurred. The researchers believed there could have been differing result had the data been collected later in the school year. Many behavioral problems tend to manifest themselves later in the school year. This would suggest the ideal of teaching of social skills over a longer period of time and reinforcing them as often as possible. Incorporating social skill instruction into the entire curriculum could be beneficial to the entire school.

Fitting the social skills to each of the targeted classes based on their each classes individual needs would be another modification. Both classes were different in

there student compositions and needs. The opinion of the researchers was that the instruction of social skills could have been improved by individualizing lessons to fit the needs of each class. The researchers also feel that the change of administration in the building had an influence on their results. The principal installed a new discipline policy over the course of the intervention and occasionally would change the policies to try to improve student behavior. How much affect this had on the researchers' data is unknown.

Researchers recommend the direct instruction of social skills to be conducted throughout the school year. Social skills need to be taught and retaught as needed. The more exposure the students have to appropriate social skills the easier it will be for them to emulate that type of desired behavior. The more practice and reinforcement the students have with appropriate social skills the more appropriate their behavior will be in school and at home.

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Appendix A

Dear Parents,

I feel that one of the major concerns in my classroom today is a lack of social skills. I am writing this letter to inform you of my intention to integrate social skill instruction into my classroom. I firmly believe this will improve student behavior, the learning environment and, therefore increase academic achievement. The outcomes of these lessons will be kept in the strictest confidentiality.

Social skills that will be taught include listening skills, respect for self and for others, and what is an acceptable noise level. When students have successfully acquired these skills the classroom environment and academic performance will improve.

Working together to achieve these goals will insure a more productive school year for all students in my classroom. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at Central school.

Sincerely Yours,

Appendix B

TEACHER OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.
1. NOT TO CLASS ON TIME					
2. TALKS OUT OF TURN					
3. DISTURBS OTHER STUDENTS					
4. DOES NOT STAY ON TASK					
5. CAN'T KEEP HANDS TO SELF					
6. TALKS BACK TO TEACHER					
7. LACKS SELF CONTROL					
8. SEEKS OUT TROUBLE					
9. DOES NOT ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES FOR ACTIONS					
10. DOES NOT STAY IN SEAT					

Appendix C

BEHAVIOR WE EXPECT TO SEE

1. Tell the truth.
2. Respect authority.
3. Obey school workers.
4. Be prompt and prepared.
5. Respect rights of others.
6. Respect property.
7. Display a concern for learning.
8. Display appropriate social skills.
9. Display appropriate character.

Appendix D

STUDENT SURVEY

Circle one of the choices.

1. Do you avoid trouble?	always	sometimes	never
2. Are you a honest person?	always	sometimes	never
3. Are you kind to others?	always	sometimes	never
4. Are you polite to others?	always	sometimes	never
5. Are you a helpful person?	always	sometimes	never
6. Do you try to get along with others?	always	sometimes	never
7. Do you act the same at home and school?	always	sometimes	never
8. Do you think your behavior is good?	always	sometimes	never

Appendix E

TEACHER SURVEY

4= strongly agree
3= agree
2= disagree
1= strongly disagree

1. Students maintain an appropriate noise level.	4 3 2 1
2. Students have difficulty staying on task.	4 3 2 1
3. Students show respect for their peers.	4 3 2 1
4. Students show respect for authority figures.	4 3 2 1
5. Students are able to follow classroom rules.	4 3 2 1
6. Behavior problems are removed from the classroom.	4 3 2 1
7. Discipline problems detract from instruction time.	4 3 2 1
8. Discipline problems have increased in recent years.	4 3 2 1